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EPA finds AllenCo facility fails to operate safely, violates federal laws

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(01/15/14) LOS ANGELES – Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notified AllenCo Energy Inc. of violations at its South Los Angeles oil production facility following the agency's November 6, 2013 inspection. EPA's investigation, prompted by community complaints regarding emissions coming from the facility, uncovered violations of both the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act.

"By failing to take necessary steps to maintain safe operations, including preventing accidental releases, the facility put the health and well being of nearby residents at risk," said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's Regional Administrator for the Pacific Southwest. "EPA will work vigorously to protect the community by ensuring that AllenCo complies with federal environmental laws."

The "General Duty Clause" of the Clean Air Act (CAA) requires companies to take measures to prevent air releases, including the cleaning of oil tanks, inspection and corrosion tests of piping, and equipment repairs and replacement. In addition, facilities must identify hazards which may result from accidental releases in order to maintain a safe facility. The Clean Water Act (CWA) requires onshore oil production facilities that may discharge oils into waterways to prepare and implement a Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) plan. Because AllenCo's facility is connected through storm drains to the Los Angeles River, it is required to have an SPCC plan.

EPA found that AllenCo:

- Failed to inspect pressure vessels, steel piping, steel tanks, or perform thickness and corrosion rate tests in piping;
- Failed to follow equipment manufacturers' recommendations for testing, calibration and repair of its methane and flame detectors;
- Failed to accurately diagram the facility;
- Failed to develop and implement a complete SPCC plan in a timely manner;
- Failed to train personnel on the proper operation and maintenance of equipment;
- Failed to maintain an emergency contact list of local agencies or develop reporting instructions for employees in case of oil discharges; and
- Failed to record inspections and produce required inspection schedules.

By January 27, 2014, AllenCo must respond to these violations. EPA is evaluating its enforcement options against the company.

AllenCo is a small oil production facility located in a residential neighborhood in south LA, approximately two miles from the University of Southern California. The facility has been operating in this location since the 1960s. The property is owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles and has been operated by AllenCo since 2009. Since 2010, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SAQMD) has received hundreds of complaints from residents near the facility of noxious odors and health effects such as headaches and nose-bleeds. EPA has coordinated closely with the SCAQMD, the Los Angeles City Attorney's office, the Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources, as well as other state and local agencies that have completed investigations of their own at the site.

For more information on the Clean Water Act SPCC, please visit: <http://www.epa.gov/oem/content/spcc/>

For more information on the Clean Air Act General Duty Clause, please visit: www.epa.gov/emergencies/docs/chem/gdc-fact.pdf

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